



# Fae Myenne Ng

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*My middle sister, Ona, jumped off the M floor of the Nam. The police said she was on downers. But I didn't translate that for Mah or tell her everything else I heard, because by then I was all worn out from dealing with death in two languages.*

— Bone

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## Quick Facts

- \* Born in 1957
- \* Chinese-American novelist
- \* Her novel *Bone* is about a Chinese-American family living in San Francisco's Chinatown

## Biography

As a first generation Chinese-American author, Fae Myenne Ng is used to hard work. Taking over ten years and many drafts to complete her first novel, *Bone*, Ng was rewarded for her efforts with a tremendous amount of praise for her story of a family of three daughters from San Francisco's Chinatown. Drawing from her own life experiences as well as stories and from the past, Ng developed *Bone* only to be criticized by some members of the Chinese community because *Bone* is not their story (Hopler). Ng's only comment is, "I can't write about all of China."

Ng, born in 1957, says that her childhood was "L-O-N-G." She grew up in the Chinatown of her novel, spoke Cantonese in her home, and attended the Cumberland Presbyterian Chinese School. Ng helped her mother, a sewing lady who made brightly colored fashion items, and sewed everything from mini-skirts in bright floral prints to "Purple T-shirts with smiley faces on them" (Ng). Ng has a good relationship with her mother and communicates with her often. Ng's father immigrated to the United States in 1940, arriving in America on the *S.S. Coolidge*. He worked as a cook for a University of California - Berkeley fraternity house. Her parents' jobs supported Fae Myenne and her brother.

This page was researched and submitted by: Mercedes Leonor Arias, Marta Artemenko, Cynthia Lee Conoran, Tara Catherine Cooper, and Kelly Marie Hopler on 5/20/98.



# Fae Myenne Ng

## Biography continued

Ng attended the Columbia University School of Arts and received her Masters Degree in Liberal Arts in 1984. She has lived in Brooklyn, New York since 1989, where she worked as a waitress to support herself while she wrote the many drafts of *Bone*. Ng, now divorced, was formerly married to writer Mark Cooverlis.

Fae Myenne Ng has received many awards and writing grants for *Bone*, earning her recognition such as the Lila Wallace - Reader's Digest Literary Fellowship, the Pushcart Prize, a National Endowment for the Arts Award, a McDowell Fellowship, and a Fellowship in Literature from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Ng is currently making use of a writing grant and is in Hong Kong working on a new novel, which she says is coming along "s-l-o-w-l-y, very."

Ng titled her first novel *Bone* to honor the tradition of Chinese-Americans sending their bones home to China because they saw the U.S. only as a place of work. The publisher didn't like the title "because it wasn't warm and fuzzy," but Ng stuck to the chosen name (Hopler). One of the themes that Ng addresses in her novel is immigration. "I wanted to explore the desire to escape. Suicide was another metaphor to speak about departure. My point was not why Ona (a character from *Bone*) committed suicide. The point was that there was a way to honor her decision. I wanted to look at the courage it takes not only to leave, but to remake another world," says the author (Draper, 88).

Ng also uses imagery to convey feeling in her novel. "The sea imagery is the most important structure to understand. In your most private moments you often circle around emotional movements - a ship moves one mile ahead and the waves push it seven miles back" (Hopler). Ng uses this element in rhythm to illustrate Chinese history and to show "how the heart moves to its own natural truth - the backwards movement of the ship fits this."

Fae Myenne Ng's primary goal as an author is to "write about true life." Her influence for *Bone* comes from Ng's witnessing the hardships that the "old-timers" faced in their lives, and she created a "fictional landscape" to show her "sadness at their passing." Ng's discipline of learning to sew helped her to write (Draper, 88). "What I learned from the sewing ladies is what you can learn from any laborer - stamina" (Draper, 88).



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